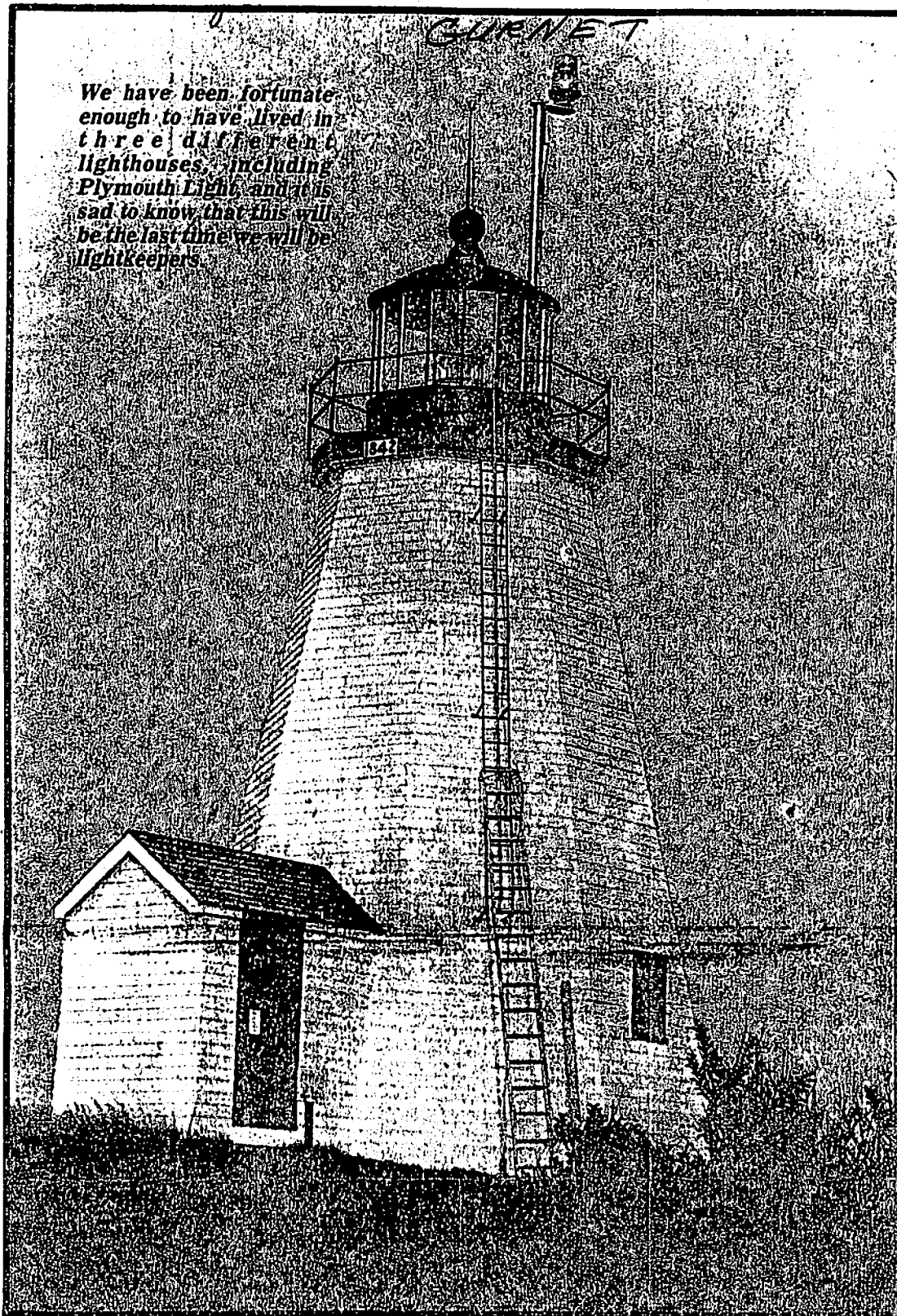


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GURNET



Plymouth (Gurnet) Light's Fresnel lense is extinguished forever, and a temporary light is fastened above the tower. The Fresnel lense (above, right), was handmade of cut-glass and brass near Birmingham, England in 1903. (Staff photos by Leanne M. Robicheau)

Editor's note: U.S. Coast Guard Light Station Plymouth, known affectionately as Gurnet Light or the Gurnet, is a familiar local landmark, day and night. There has been a lighthouse at the Gurnet for more than 200 years. Last month, the light was automated and Joseph Robicheau became Gurnet's last lightkeeper. His wife, Leanne Robicheau, is a reporter for MPG Communications, covering the town of Plympton.



By LEANNE M. ROBICHEAU
MPG News Exchange

PLYMOUTH — The pattern of his daily routine seemed no different as he climbed the 50 steps to the top of Plymouth Light on Aug. 6. But he reached to turn the rotation switch off and then stretched to flip another lever to extinguish the light for the last time. Automation had finally conquered tradition.

U.S. Coast Guard Light Station Plymouth was the next New England lighthouse in line for automation. The Coast Guard is ending a tradition that is as American as apple pie. One by one the lighthouses on the coast are being *unmanned* and *dis-established*, as the work orders state. Those words say it all. The human touch and aura of being a lighthouse keeper is gone.

"I think it's too bad," said Joseph Robicheau, Officer in Charge of Plymouth Light. "They are eliminating a tradition that has been an American way of life."

I agree with Robicheau, despite the fact that I am his wife. We have been fortunate enough to have lived in three different lighthouses, including Plymouth Light, and it is sad to know that this will be the last time we will be lightkeepers.

There are approximately 11 lighthouses still manned in the First Coast Guard District, which encompasses the area from Eastport, Maine to Watch Hill, R.I. The only manned light left in Massachusetts is Boston Light, which is scheduled to be the last light house to be unmanned, since it is the oldest light house in America.

Plymouth Light was originally built in 1768 and was later destroyed by fire. The present lighthouse was erected from 1842-43.

The lense that was removed from Gurnet was installed in 1903. It is a Fourth Order Fresnel lense. The lense, which was built near Birmingham, England, from hand-cut glass and brass is "invaluable and irreplaceable," according to A. Desharnais, district civil engineering. He remarked that few Fresnel lenses were built in England. Most were made in France.

Desharnais estimated that the cost of the lense would be \$100,000 if it was to be built with the same quality today.

The lense was disassembled and crated for shipment to the district office. Its future home is unknown at this time, but it is apt to become a museum piece.

The lense is being replaced with a new plastic lense which will have a 150 watt bulb, intensified by condensing panels. The old lense had a 1,000 watt bulb which beamed over Cape Cod Bay, had an uncorrected candlepower of 24,000 and had a nautical mile range of 25 miles in the sector. The red sector, which marks the Mary Ann Rocks, indicates that a boat is in a hazardous area. The new lense's candlepower and nautical range will be diminished considerably. The candlepower will be 1,828 and the nautical mile range will be 15 miles in the white sector, and 12 miles in the red sector.

While this "changing of the lense" takes place, there is a temporary light secured to the outside of the tower. One local resident refers to it as a "lollipop," as its shape resembles.

Most residents have expressed displeasure with automation. Several local organizations and groups made every effort to prevent the inevitable.

"I really never thought it was going to come to this," Gurnet resident Martha Keenan said.

The light station has been somewhat of a security blanket over the years for the residents of Gurnet and Saquish. This predominantly summer resort community is located four miles over the sand dunes of Duxbury Beach, but is within the boundaries of Plymouth.

Daisy Jacobs, 78, is one of the oldest and longest year round residents of the Gurnet. She has lived there for over 60 years.

"It's going to make me feel awfully bad," she said. "We did everything with the Coast Guard. It's like losing part of your family."

"We used to carry buckets of water from the fort (at the lighthouse)," said Gay Thomas, Jacobs' niece. "It's not going to be the same."



Chief Petty Officer John Wojcik (left) and Seaman Richard Williams (right) crate the fragile sections of the Fresnel lense, valued at \$100,000.

There are about nine year round families on the Gurnet and they all survive without the luxury of electricity or telephones. They do have generators that are used sparingly.

Residents have depended on the Coast Guard for fire protection, a telephone link for emergencies and a deterrent for vandals. Mariners have relied on the light station for watchful eyes. The Gurnet juts out in the entrance to Plymouth Harbor, where strong currents can trouble

the best of mariners.

Automation

The bottom floor of the lighthouse has had half of its floor-space enclosed by insulated walls. All the electronic equipment for the operation of the light and fog signal will be enclosed in this room. The control room will be heated in winter and is vented with a fan.

A Halon System will be installed for fire protection. If a fire were to start, a chemical, Freon, is released

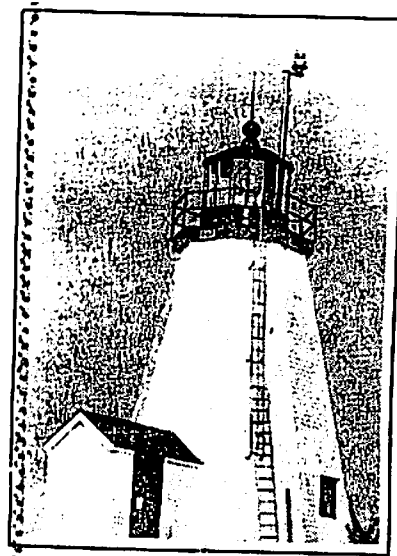
and extinguishes the flames immediately. According to Desharnais, if someone were in the room when this chemical were released, they would become very sick but it is not fatal, as are other gases.

There will be a radio link from Coast Guard Station Scituate to Duxbury Pier Light to control the fog signal. Future plans include a radio link, possibly to Scituate, to monitor the light, fog signal and to have an intrusion alarm. But for now the

light and fog signal will be mariner-monitored, said Desharnais.

Gurnet-Saquish Association will maintain the keeper's dwelling when the automation is complete. The association intends to have a caretaker take care of the premises and the grounds.

The First District Coast Guard intends to automate all its lighthouses by 1989, since the Headquarters Project which is funded by Congress, expires in 1991.



Gurnet Light